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GRANITE HORSE LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PROJECT **DECISION RECORD / RATIONALE / FONSI** (July 2003)

I. INTRODUCTION

The BLM's interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Granite Horse Landscape Management Project based on: (a) current resource conditions in the project area and (b) to meet the objectives and direction of the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Northwest Forest Plan. The proposals presented and evaluated in the Granite Horse Management Project's Environmental Assessment (EA) and its subsequent two addendums reflect what the planning team believe to be the best balance of resource conditions, resource potential and the competing management objectives. Planning work for this project began in 1998 with initiation of a public scoping opportunity.

To facilitate presenting and understanding the different elements of this decision, this decision record addresses the proposals sequentially in the order they are discussed in the EA and then in the July 2002 EA addendum (#1) and then the May 2003 EA addendum (#2).

Ten units included in *Table B-2: Summary of Treatments for all Units in the Project Area* are not addressed in this decision because the requisite surveys for survey and manage species are not fully completed. Decisions regarding these units will be addressed in future Decision Records when surveys are completed. The ten units are: 34S-06W-23-001; 35S-05W-03-001, 002, and 003; 35S-05W-11-006, 014, and 016; 35S-05W-15-002, and 015; and 35S-05W-18-001.

II. DECISION and DECISION RATIONALE

A. Alternative 1 (EA, p. 4)

Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, is rejected because it does not meet the resource management objectives identified in the Medford District Resource Management Plan. It would not address or alter many of the existing resource conditions and trends that are of major concern relative to healthy forest conditions and resource protection. The No Action alternative would perpetuate or promote undesirable resource conditions. With the No Action, these conditions would not be improved or mitigated; certain undesirable ecological trends would continue unchanged and, in some cases, would be exacerbated with the passage of time. For example, high fire hazard conditions would continue and grow, stand vigor and forest health would continue to decline, and existing erosion problems would continue uncorrected.

B. Alternatives 2 and 3 (EA, p. 4)

It is my decision to implement the actions proposed in the Granite Horse Landscape Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA #1999-28, February 2000) as outlined below. To facilitate presenting and understanding the different elements of this decision, this decision record addresses the proposal sequentially in the order they are discussed in the EA and then in each of the two subsequent EA addendums.

Environmental Assessment -

1. Recreation Trail Management (EA, p.5)

Decision: The decision is to implement the Horse Creek Ridge Trail as proposed. This includes the no thinning restriction within 25' of the trail and the diameter thinning limitations within 25 – 50' of the trail.

Rationale: While the Medford District RMP does not identify this trail as a formal trail for specific management, implementing the trail proposal would provide an additional recreational opportunity. Implementing the thinning restrictions along the trail will result in some visual screening of the adjacent more intensively managed areas and, overall, reflect an integration of the recreation and the stand / forest management objectives.

2. Riparian Reserve Treatments (EA, p. 5)

Decision: The decision is to implement the riparian reserve treatments as proposed with the modifications / clarifications included in Addendum #2 (see Item 13 - *Riparian Reserve Treatments*) below.

Rationale: Forest stand densities in some areas of the riparian reserves are much higher than are normal or sustainable. Thinning the vegetation as proposed will reduce densities and result in more vigorous stand conditions. Riparian stands which are put on a trajectory to more rapidly develop late-successional forest conditions can be more structurally diverse and can contribute to proper riparian function. Leaving riparian reserves unthinned will lead to increasing levels of tree mortality, increased fuel loadings, and an increased potential for high intensity / high severity wildfire. The proposed treatments will also allow for the reintroduction of fire in some areas of the riparian reserves.

3. Special Forest Products (EA, p.7)

Decision: Provide for special forest products harvest opportunities as proposed. Special forest product gathering / harvesting will be pursued in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the overall stand treatment objectives. Scheduling of special forest product harvesting will be integrated with the other stand treatment work.

Rationale: There is an ever-increasing demand for a wide range of forest products for both personal and commercial use. Incorporating special forest product harvesting into the forest stand treatments will provide

an opportunity to meet demand along with accomplishing other forest stand treatment/management objectives. In some instances, special forest product related vegetation treatments may be the best strategy to accomplish stand management goals. Many units, for example, may require more than one treatment (e.g., thinning and density reduction) in order to reach the management goals for healthy stands.

4. Young Stand / Forest Development Treatments (EA, p.7)

Decision: Implement the young stand / forest development treatments as proposed. After the young stand treatment is completed for a unit, a separate and unit specific fuel / fire hazard assessment will be conducted by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists to evaluate the post treatment conditions and adjust the fuel treatment proposals as needed to ensure that overall stand objectives are met. If treatment changes are made, it is anticipated that they will be relatively minor in overall scope and will be within the scope of the types of manual fuel treatments described in the EA and the impacts considered in this assessment.

Rationale: Thinning and brushing in young stands will hasten the growth of desired trees and tree species to meet long term RMP determined forest product and habitat goals of both the matrix land allocation and within the selected areas of the riparian reserves where treatment is proposed. These stands are currently overstocked or have high levels of brush species competing with the forest tree species.

5. Vegetation Treatments in the Older Seral Stages (EA, p. 8)

Decision: The decision is to implement stand harvest treatments, including post harvest treatments, in older seral stage stands per Alternative 2 except as noted below in Sections 33 and 34 and where modification is needed to insure that vegetation treatments are consistent with special status management guidelines (EA, p. 10).

Rationale: Alternative 2 is selected because it best implements the Medford District RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan. It also addresses the purpose and needs for action and the objectives as outlined in the EA. If not addressed, the high densities will lead to escalating mortality, increased fuel hazard, and, in turn, a probable decline of the wildlife connectivity function provided by these stands. By addressing the declining tree and stand vigor, the options for future management will be much broader.

I have also considered the effect of the implementation of the Riparian Reserve management, Special Status Species, and S&M species protection buffers. They will reserve from thinning / harvest treatment approximately 206 acres of the approximately 540 acres of late-successional forest habitat identified in Alternative 3.

Alternative 2 also produces a higher level of harvest volume than would result from Alternative 3. Thus, it would better meet the timber production objectives of the RMP and the BLM strategic plan while still meeting the other management objectives. This is consistent with the timber production goals of the matrix land allocation within which most of the Granite Horse project is located. One of the primary objectives of the matrix land allocation (NFP and RMP) is the production of a scheduled supply of timber.

Decision: In section 33 and 34, the prescription will be modified to retain a higher level of canopy density than described in the Alternative 2 prescription. This prescription would apply to approximately 200 acres within the following units: 35S-05W-33-004 and 010; 35S-05W-34-004 and 005. This modification will insure maintenance of the late-successional forest habitat function in the low elevation divide between the Grants Pass and Jumpoff Joe watersheds. It would be similar to the Alternative 3 prescription, but would also specifically retain older trees and other individual trees that have higher nesting potential in their large branches.

Rationale: Making this modification of the Alternative 2 prescription in Section 33 and 34 will maintain the late-successional forest habitat connectivity function of the forest stands in the divide area between the Grants Pass and Jumpoff Joe watersheds and an effective distribution of the late-successional forest habitat conditions in the watersheds. In addition to this it will reduce the existing high stand densities and the high fuel hazard.

This Alternative 2 prescription modification, in conjunction with the buffers and reserves that are being implemented, will result in the overall goal of Alternative 3 being met. Alternative 3 focused on maintaining more acres for habitat and connectivity of late-successional forest species than Alternative 2, and involved approximately 540 acres. Approximately 406 of these acres are now included in special status species buffers, riparian reserves, or they are areas that would be thinned based on the modified Alternative 2 prescription. The result is the decision is now a blend of the objectives of the two initially proposed alternatives.

Decision: The post harvest treatments (EA, p. 10) will be implemented as proposed for all harvest units. As in the case in young stand treatments noted above, a post treatment interdisciplinary fuel hazard condition evaluation will be made after harvest work is completed. This is to insure that the proposed follow-up treatment is still optimum and required (see the qualifier on the fuel hazard reduction treatments below) in light of all of the stand treatment objectives. If appropriate, the fuel treatment proposals in the EA will be adjusted to insure up-to-date site specific post harvest treatments are implemented which are consistent with the overall stand objectives. It is anticipated that if treatment adjustments are needed, they will be relatively minor in overall scope and will be within the scope of the types of fuel and vegetation treatments described in the EA and within the scope of the impacts identified and considered in this assessment.

Rationale: These treatments will serve to make the forest stands more resistant to fire.

6. Fuel Hazard Reduction Treatments (EA, p. 11)

Decision: The decision is to implement the proposed fuel hazard reduction treatments. All understory thinning will be integrated into the silvicultural stand treatment objectives for any given stand. Higher treatment priority will be given to units within the rural interface areas and adjacent to homes.

As noted in the proposed action, all units that receive any type of vegetation treatment (*e.g.*, precommercial thinning, brushing, commercial thinning, harvesting, slashing, etc.) will be evaluated using the BLM's Fuel Hazard/Risk Assessment and Treatment Recommendations analysis process after treatment and prior to implementing fuel reduction treatments. This review will be conducted by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists. It is to insure that the appropriate fuel reduction treatments are applied to meet the fuel loadings

and fire hazard reduction goals and other resource and safety goals. Based on this review and analysis, the proposed fuel reduction treatments may be modified, adjusted or dropped so as to better accomplish silvicultural objectives, resource protection objectives within the implementation considerations and opportunities. Substantial changes to the proposed treatments are not anticipated. Those changes that are made will be consistent with the descriptions, overall extent and impacts addressed in the EA and its range of fuel treatments alternatives. In some instances, for example, hand piling of slash and pile burning will be utilized when prescribed under burning is not feasible or where high surface fuel loadings exist and/or it is operationally impractical to implement because of significant risk to ecological processes, resource values, and private property and rural residences. Any changes that do occur will be within the scope of overall effects anticipated in the EA's analysis and it is not anticipated that any additional NEPA analysis / documentation will be necessary or undertaken as a part of these changes.

Rationale: Fuel hazard reduction treatments of both activity generated fuels and fuels in otherwise unmanaged stands are an important aspect of the project, particularly in areas in the rural interface. Reducing fuel loadings and altering fuel profiles will, in the event of a wildfire, make suppression efforts safer and effective. Integrating fuel reduction work with other forest vegetation treatments will result in overall forest stand management objectives being better met.

7. Wildlife Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Burning (EA, p. 14)

Decision: Implement the wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement prescribed burns as proposed.

Rationale: Implementing these actions will improve wildlife habitat conditions and restore / maintain the vigor and diversity within these areas of chaparral, grassland and oak stand vegetation / habitat types. It will also reduce fuel hazard in the treated areas.

8. Roads and Transportation Management (EA, p. 16)

Decision: The decision is to implement the proposed roadwork to the extent necessary to support the Granite Horse timber sale. (See also EA Addendum #2 decision below.)

Rationale: This roadwork is necessary to support the Granite Horse timber sale and to correct existing road conditions that are contributing to sediment delivery to the streams.

9. Project Design Features (EA, p. 15)

The project design features described in the EA are to be treated as integral parts of the proposed action and are to be implemented, *except* as modified by or added to as noted below:

- a. Seed mixes for erosion control work (EA, p. 17) would be limited to a combination of native grasses or sterile wheat grasses when necessary for erosion control. The native seed used will be from sources in Southwest Oregon/Northwest California to the greatest extent possible. Recognizing that the availability of appropriate seed from this geographic area may be limited, the geographic

source may be broadened to include species native to the Pacific Northwest or the Intermountain region, if necessary.

b. The seasonal operating constraints (EA, p. 18) restricting activities around known northern spotted owl nest sites will be March 1 to June 30 (changed from March 1 to June 15). This change is based on the mandatory project design criteria (PDC) included in the USFWS's October 12, 2001 Biological Opinion for FY02-03 timber sales.

c. In units where a slashbuster is used, no mechanical treatment will take place within one site potential tree of the edge of the drip line of trees identified as being occupied by red tree voles (RTVs). Slash within the buffers will be treated by hand by 1) lopping and scattering, or 2) by pulling slash back from these areas, or 3) by piling but not burning any pile that has the potential to "smoke out" or "heat up" RTV occupied trees.

e. The following PDF is added: All cultural sites will be protected as required by the Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979. Protection measures to retain a site's integrity will consist of buffering and precluding treatments within the buffers.

10. Proposed Mitigating Measures

Proposed Mitigating Measure #1 (EA p. 41): Reject. *Dendroica caerulea intricatulum* and *Bryoria tortuosa* are no longer considered Survey and Manage species in need of special protection measures for persistence. They were removed from the Survey and Manage species list in early 2003 after an Annual Species Review process was completed. *Bryoria tortuosa* was removed from the list because it was determined that it was not closely associated with late-successional or old growth forest. A second reason for removal for this species and for *Dendroica caerulea intricatulum* (in Josephine and nearby counties) was that the reserve system and other Standards and Guidelines of the Northwest Forest Plan appeared to provide for a reasonable assurance of both species persistence.

Proposed Mitigating Measure #2 (EA p. 48): Accept. Buffered groupings of snags are more likely to remain after harvest activities as they create less of safety concern / threat.

Proposed Mitigating Measure #3 (EA p. 49): Reject. The purpose of this proposed mitigating measure was to address the potential decline in the connectivity function of some of the late-successional forest stands. The special density prescription noted above for these areas will meet the purpose of the mitigating measure while addressing stand vigor and fuel reduction goals as well.

Proposed Mitigating Measure #3a (EA p. 49): Reject. These types of considerations are incorporated in the special prescription noted above in the treatment of older seral stage stand decision.

Proposed Mitigating Measure #4 (EA p. 51): Accept. Limiting access to these areas will help prevent re-occurring disturbance to wildlife and help reduce soil damage.

Proposed Mitigating Measure #5 (EA p. 57): Reject. The initially proposed 1,000' buffer was based on

1995 interim guidelines. These guidelines have been superceded by the 2001 SEIS that amended the Survey and Manage requirements. Consistent with the 2001 SEIS (p. 38), a 250' no harvest buffer will be implemented around the mine adits located in or adjacent to Sections 34-5-30, 34-4-30, and 35-5-4,5 and 8.

EA Addendum #1 -

11. EA Addendum #1 - Easement ROW Agreement (p. 2)

Decision: Implement the ROW agreement as proposed.

Rationale: The ROW agreement and landings will minimize future new road construction and provide future ingress and egress onto BLM lands for personnel and contractors. The ROW agreement with Baxter will be used to provide log landings for helicopter harvesting in the surrounding BLM harvest units.

12. EA Addendum #1 - Project Design Features (p. 3)

The project design features described in the Addendum #1 will be implemented as stated.

EA Addendum #2 -

13. EA Addendum #2 - Riparian Reserve Treatments (p. 2)

Decision: Vegetation treatments within the riparian reserves would be implemented as proposed. As such, they will be limited to thinning, brushing, and slashbusting of understory vegetation where the treatments will promote the stated objectives. This could include cutting and removal of understory trees up to 12" DBH. The indicated down wood retention standards would be implemented as proposed.

Rationale: Forest stand densities found in some areas of the riparian reserves are much higher than are normal or sustainable. Thinning the vegetation will reduce densities. This will produce more vigorous growing conditions. Leaving them unthinned will lead to increasing levels of tree mortality, increased fuel loadings and the potential for high intensity / high severity wildfires. The proposed treatment will also allow for the reintroduction of fire into the stands where and when it can be done with a low intensity burn. (See also Riparian Reserve treatment rationale on page 2 of this Decision Record.)

14. EA Addendum #2 - Vegetation Treatments in Older Stands (p. 3)

Decision: The decision is to permit the use of tractors where appropriate in the two specified units.

Rationale: As noted in the Addendum, this change allows better use of the existing roads and skid trails to be made. It will also provide the opportunity to decommission a poorly constructed and currently eroding road. The decommissioning would include the restoration of the natural water flow across the old road sub grade.

15. EA Addendum #2 - Prescribed Fire / Fuel Hazard Reduction (p. 3)

Decision: The decision is to permit the use of the slashbuster machine in those areas specified (see Table A-3, Addendum #2.) All identified project design features will be implemented.

Rationale: Treating vegetation / fuels with a Slashbuster can reduce the potential level of overall smoke emissions. The potential for wildfire escapes would also be reduced. Treatment costs are highly favorable as compared to the hand piling and burning treatments. In addition, slashbuster shredding results in an immediate reduction in the fuel hazard.

16. EA Addendum #2 - Roads and Transportation Management (p. 6)

Decision/ Rationale: The decision is to implement the stated additional road maintenance standards within areas of designated coho critical habitat as described. Incorporating these standards into the project will better insure protection of coho as well as compliance with the NMFS's biological opinion.

Decision / Rationale: The decision is to implement the Louse Creek drainage road maintenance and road protection work as proposed. Implementing this work will reduce the potential for adverse impacts on coho and coho habitat due to road use and maintenance.

Decision / Rationale: The decision is to implement the additional roadwork outlined in the Addendum. This will correct items overlooked in the initial EA.

Decision / Rationale: The decision is to make every effort to obtain permission to use the alternate helicopter landing site. Implementation of the harvesting in these units will be postponed until such time as a safer and more suitable landing site is available for use. This means that approximately 100 MBF of timber harvest will be deferred at this time.

17. EA Addendum #2 - Project Design Features (p. 7)

Decision: The proposed changes to the seasonal operating restrictions for helicopter logging in certain areas of the project are accepted and will be implemented as outlined in the Addendum.

Rationale: This will broaden the permissible timber hauling operating season from harvest units tributary to selected roads, roads which are designed and constructed to be able to withstand extended season use. This will provide greater flexibility to the timber sale purchaser.

18. Proposed Mitigating Measure

Proposed Mitigation Measure #A2-1(Addendum #2, p. 18): Accepted. The actual amount of acreage seeded would be dependent upon availability of native seed and amount of seedbed suitable for seed germination after the follow up burns.

Rationale: This is an opportunity to seed with native grasses after a treatment.

19. Other

Further refinement of actual treatments may be necessary during project implementation. Such changes and refinements are a normal part of the implementation of projects of this nature and reflect the BLM's ongoing effort to reduce potentially adverse environmental impacts. In the event that a refinement is determined to be necessary, it will first be reviewed to ensure that it is consistent with, and within the scope of, the EA, the EA addendum and this decision.

Such refinements also reflect the incorporation of new information that arises during project implementation. For example, since the preparation of the EA, much refinement of the timber harvest / thinning acreage has occurred as a result of the on-the-ground implementation of riparian reserve and Survey and Manage species buffers. Other changes have also been made since the original EA, hence the supplemental Addendums #1 and #2. No further changes that would require additional analysis are anticipated at this time.

In that Port-Orford Cedar does not occur in the Granite Horse project area, these decisions will not affect Port-Orford Cedar or the potential spread of *Phytophthora lateralis* and no special mitigation measures are necessary.

C. BLM's Strategic Plan Context

The decision is made within the context of the BLM's FY2000 to FY2005 Strategic Plan and its rationale is also based on this plan. The Granite Horse decision will implement a range of activities that will promote a number of the Strategic Plan's goals:

- *Goal 1.2: Provide opportunities for environmentally responsible commercial activities;*

- *1.2.3: By FY2005, consistent with established health standards, annually offer for sale, on a decadal average, 211 million board feet of timber in western Oregon (Oregon and California Grant Lands).*

The Granite Horse project's EA estimates that this decision will result in an estimated timber volume of over 8.2 MMBF being provided to the local economy while thinning stands to create more vigorous and healthy stand conditions or to begin a stand regeneration process in conjunction with maintaining high levels of stand diversity.

- *Goal 1.4: Reduce threats to public health, safety and property.*

All of the areas to be thinned include fuel treatments to reduce the fuel hazard levels and in turn provide better protection of public property / resources. There are other areas where fuel and fire hazard reduction is a primary objective. Fire behavior and suppression difficulties experienced in recent fires in southwest Oregon (e.g., the Biscuit) clearly demonstrate the fuel hazard conditions in local forests and the need for proactive fuel hazard reduction work that will reduce threats to public health, safety and property. This is part of the Granite

Horse project's objectives.

- 1.4.2: Assess the condition of BLM-maintained roads to identify public and administrative access needs, maintenance requirements to resolve public safety and environmental concerns, and prospective road closures.

Preparation of the Granite Horse project included road assessments of all of the roads in the project area. Maintenance and repair needs were identified. Roads were evaluated for closure opportunities. Road side brushing and pruning will be done as needed during maintenance work to enhance public safety. Approximately 2.0 miles of existing or temporary roads constructed under the project will be decommissioned upon the conclusion of their use.

- Goal 2.2: Restore at-risk resources and maintain functioning systems

- 2.2.2: Achieve proper functioning condition or an upward trend on BLM-administered land.

The Granite Horse Project will result in an overall reduction in fuel loadings and stand densities moving them closer to historical levels and normal ranges. Roads will be repaired, maintained or decommissioned which will contribute to the attainment of the ACS objectives and toward maintaining properly functioning systems. The project will also restore and reinvigorate a variety of habitats (e.g., oak woodlands and chaparral).

D. National Fire Plan Context

This decision is also made within the context of the National Fire Plan and the rationale also comes from this plan. This Fire Plan, a culmination of various reports, (*i.e.*, Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health), accompanying budget requests, Congressional direction, and resulting strategies, plans, projects, and other activities have set the stage and provided direction for an increased application and management of prescribed fire and various other fuel treatments on federally managed lands. This is further reinforced by the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy along with its accompanying 2001 review and update.

The Granite Horse project area encompasses portions of the wildland/urban interface that fall within the Grants Pass “Community-at-Risk” (under the National Fire Plan (Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 3)). It is also adjacent to the Merlin Community-at-Risk. Consequently, special regional and national level attention is placed on this area as a wildland/urban interface community within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire. This emphasis extends 1½ miles beyond the Communities-at-Risk boundary.

Much of the project area has high risk fire regimes and is classified as fire condition classes two or three under the Department of the Interior’s “Cohesive Strategy.” The fire regimes in these fire condition classes have been moderately to significantly altered from their historical range of fire frequency. To restore them to their historical fire regimes, these lands require some level of restoration through mechanical and prescribed fire

treatments (Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health, DOI, March 2001 Draft). The Granite Horse project includes a range of management actions directed at this restoration and at reducing the high wildfire risk on Federal lands.

IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The USFWS's 2001 Biological Opinion (log BO # 1-7-01-F-032) addresses timber sale projects for FY02-03 including the Granite Horse timber sale, which will be based upon the current decision. The Service has stated its opinion that the proposed action would not jeopardize the continued existence of ESA listed species. The present decision regarding the Granite Horse project's timber sale is consistent with all of the mandatory terms and conditions identified in this biological opinion. It also incorporates and meets all of the identified recommended conservation measures.

In accordance with the ESA and the Magnuson- Stevens Act, effects on Southern Oregon/ Northern California coho and Essential Fish Habitat were evaluated. It was determined that the project would not effect coho, designated critical habitat, or Essential Fish Habitat for coho or chinook salmon.

The project will not adversely affect any sites of cultural or historical significance. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was informed of the BLM's finding in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5(b).

The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and of the Grande Ronde were notified of this project during the scoping and / or the EA's public comment period. Josephine County Commissioners and the Josephine County forestry department were also contacted. No responses were received.

V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public notification and involvement for the Granite Horse Landscape Management Project was initiated in April 1998 with the mailing of a scoping notice to 300 individuals and organizations which had previously requested to be notified of such projects, Josephine County officials, native American Tribes, and landowners of record (county tax rolls) for private land adjacent to the project area. Notices were also published in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Eight letters of comment / input were received during this scoping phase.

The primary topics raised in letters from organizations included: BLM Survey and Manage program issues, forest health issues, furbearing mammal protection, soil quality standards, BLM road construction and maintenance issues, cumulative impacts issues. One organization requested that there be no commercial extraction of forest products.

Letters from residents in the project area included the following comments:

- Logging near Agee road is not desirable to local residents. BLM should dispose of slash with

chippers (not fire and smoke). Erosion was noted on some of the old tractor trails in the area.

- Sexton Mountain trail needs restoration and protection. Indian Prayer Rock has a value to protect but the exact location is unknown. The Cherry Creek mining site has an historical interest to protect and could be a possible walk in campground. Red Mountain has unique vegetation habitat. Wildflowers in the meadows are of interest. The old growth stands should be preserved. The Surrey road area is used for recreational walking. The old home site near Fall Creek is a potential recreation site.

- Water quality from springs has been affected the past few years; elk habitat near the top of Cherry Creek drainage should be protected; and some mineshafts are unmarked and dangerous in the area. Shorthorn Gulch road needs some drainage correction; the power line road is not maintained and is eroding. One resident is opposed to fertilizer use on forest ground.

A formal public comment period for the Granite Horse Landscape Management Project's EA was held in March-April 2000; for Addendum #1 and Addendum #2 during May - June 2003. The public was notified of comment opportunities via a newspaper notice and letters to 200 individuals, Tribes, organizations and government entities. Eleven letters were received in response to these public outreach efforts.

In general, the comments expressed the following: 1) support for the fuel hazard reduction work that is a part of the project; 2) concern about harvesting / thinning in old-growth forest stands and the potential impact of doing so; 3) the view that thinning / harvesting in old growth stands is not consistent with the NFP's or the watershed analyses; 4) concern about tractor logging and how it might compact soils and spread noxious weeds; and 5) reservations about the use a slashbuster machine. The ID planning team reviewed the proposals and the analysis in light of these comments. With regard to the issues commented on:

- Harvesting and thinning in stands / units that meet the definition of old growth forest is very minimal – no large areas, only small inclusions of old growth stands in mature seral stage areas. The impacts of this were discussed in the EA and are consistent with the RMP. Adjustment of the silvicultural prescription in key areas and the extent of buffers and reserves areas are expected to maintain reasonable levels and distributions of late-successional forest across the project area.
- Tractor logging is limited to approximately 125 acres of the 1,042 acre timber sale project. This is a small area and tractor use is constrained to minimize the potential areas of disturbance, compaction and potential for noxious weed spread.
- The use of the slashbuster machine is constrained so as to minimize potential impacts. Its use also reflects a balance between its much lower cost, its more immediate change in the fuel hazard, and the potential change to the vegetation and wildlife habitats.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

A. Plan Consistency

Based on the information in the Granite Horse Landscape Management Project's EA, in the record, and from

the letters and comments received from the public about the project, I conclude that the decisions in this Decision Record are consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and, the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001). They are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, The Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations. They are also consistent with Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

This decision will not have any adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution (per Executive Order 13212).

B. Finding of No Significant Impact

On the basis of the information contained in the environmental assessment, the project planning record, and a consideration of the comments and site specific information received from the public regarding the Granite Horse Landscape Management Project, it is my determination that the decision stated above will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment beyond those analyzed in the plans and NEPA documents to which the EA is tiered. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts and effects addressed by the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Northwest Forest Plan, their EIS documents and their respective Records of Decision. Thus, the Granite Horse project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement (EIS) (or supplement to the existing EISs) is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This conclusion is based on my consideration of the CEQ's criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA and based on my understanding of the project. As noted above, the analysis of effects has been completed within the context of the Medford District's Resource Management Plan and it is consistent with that plan and the scope of effects anticipated from that plan. The analysis of effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of impacts.

I have considered the intensity of the impacts anticipated from this Granite Horse decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested by the CEQ. With regard to each:

- 1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.* The assessment has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts. None of the individual or cumulative effects have been identified as being significant. Impacts are within the scope of the EISs to which the project's EA is tiered.
- 2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspect of this project has been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. The fuel and fire hazard reduction elements of the project will have a beneficial impact on public health and safety, particularly within the rural interface / wildland urban interface areas.

3) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* The effects of the Granite Horse project are similar in nature to those of many other projects that are implemented within the scope of the Northwest Forest Plan and the Medford District's Resource Management Plan. There is a continual full range of debate, findings and opinions about the potential effects of such land management activities as evidenced by the public comments received regarding the Granite Horse project. It underscores a level of uncertainty that exists in assessing the changes that may occur as a result of all such projects. This uncertainty is acknowledged by the EISs to which the Granite Horse EA is tiered. Neither the analysis nor the public comments identified any significant or unique levels of controversy specific to the effects of the project. Certainly there was a range of views expressed regarding the desirability of some elements of the project (e.g., commercial harvesting and road construction) and the desirability of some of the changes that would result (e.g., wildlife habitat changes).

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* The action and the decision will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. It is one of many similar projects designed to implement the RMP and NFP.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant cumulative impacts have been identified. The project is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the RMP – EIS.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The project area does not include any listed National Historic Register sites or sites known to be eligible. Cultural sites in the project will be protected per the project design features noted above.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* The project includes project design features that preclude adverse impacts on ESA listed species. The BLM's evaluation of potential impacts on listed coho, designated coho critical habitat, and Magnuson Stevens Essential Fish Habitat concluded that there would be no effect from activities associated with the timber sale portions of the Granite Horse project. As a result consultation with NOAA – Fisheries was not necessary. The BLM's evaluation of other components of the project concluded that they might affect but would not likely to adversely affect (NLAA) listed coho, coho critical habitat or MSA EFH. These activities and effects are consistent with those activities already consulted on in the "Programmatic Biological and Conference Opinion (August

8, 2001). Additional consultation regarding these project components is therefore not needed.

ESA consultation with the USFWS was completed with the determination that the project is not likely to adversely affect T&E species. As noted in the decision, some changes are made to the proposal to insure consistency with mandatory terms and conditions set forth by the regulatory agencies.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.
There is no indication that this decision will result in actions that will threaten a violation.

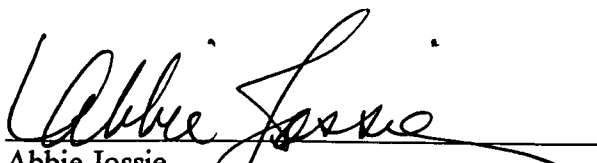
VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

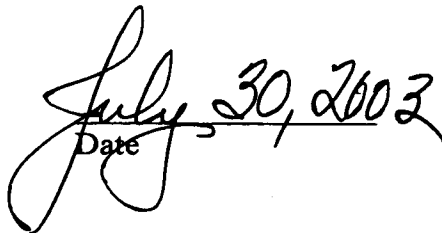
This decision is a forest management decision. Administrative remedies are available to persons who believe that they will be adversely affected by this Decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulations 43 CFR § 5003.2(a&b), the effective date of the decision, as it relates to an advertised timber sale(s), will be when the first Notice of Sale for such a sale appears in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located. This newspaper is the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of the first notice of sale establishes the effective date of the decision for those portions of this decision record included in the timber sale and timber sale prospectus. The effective date of this decision establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulation 43 CFR § 5003.2 (a&c), the effective date of this decision, as it pertains to actions which are not part of an advertised timber sale, will be the date of publication of the Notice of Decision and FONSI in The Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the Grants Pass Daily Courier will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

Any contest of this decision should state specifically which portion or element of the decision is being protested and cite the applicable CFR regulations.


Abbie Jossie
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management


Date